New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1957

Volume XVIII, Number 6 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of March 4, 1957

1957 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

1956 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
Apple Cart (The)	258
*Auntie Mame	229
*Bells Are Ringing	182
Candide	176
Girls of Summer	197
Good Woman of Setzuan (The)	161
*Happiest Millionaire (The)	193
*Happy Hunting	166
*Li'l Abner	202
*Long Day's Journey Into Night	217
Macbeth	237
*Major Barbara	233
*Middle of the Night	370
*Mr. Wonderful	339
*Most Happy Fella (The)	308
*My Fair Lady	345
Reluctant Debutante (The)	269
Richard II	253
Romeo and Juliet	250
Saint Joan	285
*Separate Tables	246
Speaking of Murder	157
Troilus and Cressida	149
*Uncle Willie	154

•

1955 Vol.

*Damn Yankees	310
*Diary of Anne Frank (The)	257
*Inherit the Wind	322
Matchmaker (The)	194
*No Time for Sergeants	238

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of March 4, 1957*

1957 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1957

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
Adieux (Les)	337
Chien du Jardinier (Le)	337
Christophe Colomb	369
Clearing in the Woods (A)	393
Eugenia	366
Feu la Mere de Madame	351
*Hidden River (The)	378
*Hole in the Head (A)	330
*Holiday for Lovers	342
Intermezzo	345
Measure for Measure	381
Misanthrope (Le)	359
Nuits de la Colere (Les)	351
*Potting Shed (The)	372
Small War on Murray Hill	397
*Taming of the Shrew (The)	334
*Tunnel of Love (The)	347
*Visit to a Small Planet (A)	356
Volpone	361
Waiting for Godot	385
*Waltz of the Toreadors (The)	390
*Ziegfeld Follies	327

Theatre Openings

"Adieux (Les)" "Chien du Jardinier (Le)"
"Taming of the Shrew (The)"
"Hole in the Head (A)" "Ziegfeld Follies"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of March 4, 1957*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Ziegfeld Follies"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

March 2, 1957

THEATER

'Ziegfeld Follies'

By WALTER KERR

MISS BEATRICE LILLIE makes her first entrance in the new "Ziegfeld Follies" out of the snow. Two enormous doors open wide to silhouette the lady against falling flakes, a great black muff held demurely in her arms, a wide black hat made of dried pampas grass billowing over her eyes.

She sidles into what turns out to be a rather ravishing restaurant. She studies the menu—at pole-vault length. She savors the wine (she mistrusts it), she engages in delicate battle with some exceptionally limp celery (or was it asparagus in Hollandaise sauce?), and she almost catches a large ear of buttered corn as it frolics right off the table. Turning her attention to an impetuous lobster, she tidily trims its claws with a pair of garden shears, pausing only to dip her handsomely gloved hands into the finger bowl. Sated after her four-minute joust with a magnificent cuisine, she rises to go—a figure of sad, savage, baffling splendor.

For those four wild minutes I laughed as though I might never laugh again.

And I damn near didn't. When the producers, sketch writers, librettists and composers send the enchanted Miss Lillie back out into that snow, it's like Lillian Gish being turned out of the farmhouse in "Way Down East." Nobody is ever going to be nice to her again.

• • •

What they're going to do to our girl—to our beloved girl—is shove her out in front of the curtain to sing a mock ballad ("Intoxication") over the prostrate form of a fellow who's passed out on her. Neither he nor the number ever quite comes to. They're going to send her up in an airplane, as a ghoulish hostess, to scare all the passengers to death with her grisly solicitude. The sketch doesn't really get off the ground.

They're going to put her through the mystifying paces of a bit of Geisha-girl gong-ringing—a sketch without a beginning, a middle, or an excuse—and, come suburban train time, they're going to pick her up in that rocking moon again and fly her over the audience with nary a lyric to light her way.

• • •

Need I say that she is personally glorious as she tosses garter after garter to the customers below? And it's true that every once in awhile she nearly wins out: there's a heartening little lift, for instance, as she unsuccessfully tries to adjust her torso to the outlines of an Oriental couch.

There is, in addition, a very winning performer available for occasional salvage operations in the person of Billy de Wolfe. Toward the end of the first half, after a succession of costume parades and ballroom dances has numbed nearly every human faculty, Mr. de Wolfe strolls out, starts his warmup from scratch, and haughtily proposes to do a highly dramatic scene.

By the time he has brought up the house lights to silence the noisier ushers, and subsequently threatened to clear the house entirely, it is thoroughly evident that Mr. de Wolfe is a polite clown to reckon with, an ingratiating friend when a friend is needed. But, like Miss Lillie, he's given other things to do—simulate rock and roll in a leather jacket, introduce any number of feathered but not exactly fascinating showgirls—and the wear and tear tells.

• • •

This "Follies" is a "Follies" out of the trunk—and the Saratoga trunk at that. All the spangles and boas and starlit backdrops of every musical since "The Black Crook" have been hauled out of their hiding-places, and simply hung on the stage. No real grace, no discernible wit, no true enthusiasm fills them—with either freshness or genuine nostalgia. The fierce smile and fancy footwork of Harold Lang helps a little; the lightness of partner Helen Wood helps a bit more, and a trio composed of Jane Morgan, Micki Marlo, and Carol Lawrence (watch that girl) finally succeeded in stopping the show, a rather dangerous thing to do considering how slowly it was moving.

But love and energy—and even glorious talent—won't do it. What this world of gold portals and pink top hats needs is a writer, a funny writer.

"ZIEGFELD FOLLIES"

Revue with music and lyrics by Jack Lawrence, Richard Myers, Howard Dietz, Sammy Fain, David Rogers, Colin Romoff, Dean Fuller, Marshall Barer, Carolyn Leigh, Philip Springer; sketches by Arnie Rosen, Coleman Jacoby, David Rogers, Allan Jeffreys, Maxwell Grant; directed by John Kennedy; dances staged by Frank Wagner; settings and costumes by Raoul Pene du Bois; lighting by Paul Morrison; musical director, Max Meth; presented by Mark Kroll and Charles Conaway at the Winter Garden Theatre, March 1, 1957, with the following featured cast: Beatrice Lillie, Billy De Wolfe, Harold Lang, Jane Morgan, Helen Wood, Micki Mario, John Philip, Bob and Larry Leslie, Carol Lawrence, Jay Marshall, Tony Franco and Bruce Laffey.

DAILY NEWS

March 2, 1957

'Ziegfeld Follies' Has Bea Lillie At Her Best; Lovely Girls, Too

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Taken on its own terms, which aren't quite the terms of Ziegfeld because he took those with him when he died, the new "Ziegfeld Follies" at the Winter Garden is a handsome and enjoyable big revue. Taken on Beatrice Lillie's terms, it is splendid, for Miss Lillie has never been funnier or more light-hearted. Right from her first appearance, a lunatic pantomime in which a ladylike lady dines alone, Miss Lillie had last evening's first-nighters in thrall. And when she zoomed out over the audience on a paper moon, bestowing garters to boxholders and pewsitters, the years fell away from all of us and there was innocent joy in the world.

A "Follies" would indeed be a counterfeit without girls. In my solemn judgment, the show girls and chorus ladies of this new production stack up to—if you will pardon the expression—any of the many whom the master himself glorified.

Sentimental Number

Putting Miss Lillie aside for a moment, which is like asking Rockefeller Center to move over just a bit, I should report that there are some good sketches, attractive dances, a song or two which the audience liked, and a second-act opening number which has fine charm and sentiment.

In this number, "Two a Day on the Milky Way," Harold Lang, as a tank-town song-and-dance man, finally lands on the Big Time. Here he is with all the stars of yesteryear—W. C. Fields, Will Rogers, Fannie Brice and all the glittering host of Ziegfeld's time.

De Wolfe Scores

Working with and without Miss Lillie is the personable and versatile Billy De Wolfe. He can do an excellent satire on Presley and the rock-and-rollers and then, with no trouble at all, impersonate a lady gossip at a supermarket. In this sketch he and Miss Lillie have a hilarious time hacking away at the personal reputations of such TV deities as Texanjinx and Dorothyndick. De Wolfe voices the dark suspicion that Dorothy is really mad about Bennett Cerf.

Lang, who spins like a trout lure, has an attractive and unusually well-schooled dancing partner, Helen Wood. Three girls, Jane Morgan, Carol Lawrence and Micki Marlo, sell a song called "Salesmanship." Miss Marlo looks just like Clara Bow.

The Real Ziegfeld

Raoul Pene du Bois' sets and costumes are stylish and opulent, and one layout, an oriental affair, is a staircase-and-feathers confection in the true Ziegfeldian manner. You should see Miss Lillie coming down those steps as a harem inmate.

Not all of the sketches, not all of the songs, ring the bell, and even Miss Lillie has a tussle with a Japanese number called "Kabuki Lil." But it is a pleasant revue, and all is forgiven when Lady Beatrice floats over the customers singing the late Herman Hupfeld's nonsensical song about June and Moon.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

March 2, 1957

Auntie Bea Dines On Cold Potatoes

By TOM DONNELLY.

The Golden Jubilee edition of the "Ziegfeld Follies" (at the Winter Garden) is a great big clambake minus the clams.

The real tragedy of the occasion is that the brilliant, the magnetic, the droll, the incomparable, the superlative Beatrice Lillie is stranded without any material. The show has bushels of pink feathers and beads and gew-gaws, but no material.

Since Miss Lillie is a genius, she does enliven the evening with brilliant nods and becks and frowns and hops and skips. She is glimpsed as a lady dining alone in sinister splendor, grappling with stalks of wayward asparagus, manicuring a lobster, and haughtily reading a menu through her hat.

She is an airline stewardess, driving the passengers crazy by humming "I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling" and cheerfully noting that the luncheon dishes are unbreakable, because "if there's a crash the company feels it won't be a total loss."

A Tough Row.

She perches on a crescent moon, floating high above the audience and tossing her garters to the customers. As a rajah's favorite she sits apprehensively on a bed of nails.

She is "Kabuki Lil," puttering about among gongs, tea cups and folding screens, and when she hears the strains of the hit tune from "Madame Butterfly" she immediately peers out to sea, clutching a doll and waving an American flag.

Unhappily, most of these stimulating bits and pieces are embedded in sketches with but a single destination: Nowhere. And Miss Lillie has done some of these things to far better effect in other shows. I'm afraid Auntie Bea has fallen on evil days.

The star's principal assistant, Billy De Wolfe, also has his moments, but they are few and far between, and he, too, is obliged to fall back on routines dredged up out of the past.

Lots of Gilded Hay.

Indeed, this "Ziegfeld Follies" is fiercely faithful to the theater of yesterday, and not yesterday's best theater, either. There are six-foot showgirls striding about in clusters of grapes, there are fans to the right of them and fans to the left of them, and if the management had been just a trifle more extravagant an effect of giddy burlesque might have been achieved.

As it is, I have a terrible suspicion that this bale of gilded hay is being offered in the name of Beauty.

Harold Lang and Helen Wood do some expert, flamboyantly acrobatic dancing now and again, and a handsome blonde vocalist named Jane Morgan is allowed to register occasionally.

Miss Morgan, by the way, figures in the one really hilarious sequence in the show. Miss Morgan, disguised as a bride, sings a ballad titled "Make Me" to her groom. The lyric goes: "Make me the one that you crave—your queen or your slave."

Miss Morgan intones these rich sentiments with tragic intensity, and the item isn't supposed to be funny, but it is. And how.

It's easily the most fascinating lyric since Ruth Etting (I think it was) used to croon a ballad containing this delightful construction: "There is a mountain between us, a mountain I foolishly made."

All This and a Dance.

There is one good splashy dance sequence: "Honorable Mambo," with a very pretty and talented girl named Carol Lawrence heading a horde of Japanese students of South American rhythms. There is a monologist named Jay Marshall who tries to evoke merriment by doing music hall routines he forthrightly labels terrible. Well, they are.

For the record, it might be noted that last night's showstopper was a song called "Salesmanship," delivered by three young ladies in sweaters: the Misses Morgan and Lawrence and Micki Marlo.

Those girls certainly know how to wear sweaters.

The whole town will be talking about the "Ziegfeld Follies" today. Unless I miss my guess, everybody will be wondering what that edition with Tallulah, which was considered too deficient for exposure on Broadway, could possibly have been like.

The New York Times

March 2, 1957

Theatre: Tired Blood

By BROOKS ATKINSON

LIKE everything else that is mortal, the "Ziegfeld Follies" is susceptible to the infirmities of old age. The edition that opened at the Winter Garden last evening shows symptoms of tired blood.

On the masthead of the program, the name of Beatrice Lillie outranks the title of the show. There is something more than protocol in that studied arrangement. For the successive appearances of the peerless Lady Peel are the only interruptions to the wistful monotony that characterizes this bemused carnival.

Once the preliminary routines are out of the way, Miss Lillie appears in mock-majesty at the tall doors of some fashionable restaurant—elegantly dressed under a floppy hat that destroys the effect of the whole creation, gallantly ignoring the snow that falls softly through the night.

In her imperious moments, Miss Lillie is always a funny figure. She looks like a repressed schoolteacher swimming through some social occasion that is fabulously above her station. Not a word is spoken in this first sketch. But as Miss Lillie tries politely to cope with a bunch of flabby asparagus, an ear of corn that rolls off the table and a lobster that is pitifully dead, everyone in the audience understands this satiric pantomime of high society manners. It is an effortless and brilliant piece of work in the personal style of a comic genius.

Elsewhere in the program, Miss Lillie appears as a ghoulish airplane hostess (she says she was once a Hot Cross nurse); a voluptuous if nervous courtesan to an Indian rajah; a dainty, timid Japanese lady fumbling her way through the tea ceremony; a ravishing "Follies" girl who swings out over the audience in a sickle moon and tosses out enough garters to supply a gent's smoker with iniquitous excitement.

Miss Lillie's material is tenuous and thin. It lacks the gusto and variety of "An Evening With Beatrice Lillie," which upset the gravity of the universe in 1952, but the acid smile, the subtle imperfection in a grand gesture, the one flat note in a maudlin song, the embarrassed hesitation in a scene of passion are as eloquent as ever, and comprise one of the comic treasures of the theatre.

Believing loyally in the glory of the past, the manufacturers of this "Follies" have gone faithfully through the motions. The show girls, with fruit-salad headgear, twine languidly across the stage. Raoul Pène du Bois' scenery looks as much like a wedding cake as possible.

Harold Lang and Helen Wood dance brightly. Billy De Wolfe appears in sketches. Micki Marlo sings rhapsodically—"Those are the lips that have never been kipsed," or at any rate it sounds like that. Jane Morgan is another pleasant singer.

Any number of songs by any number of Tin Pan Alley maestris are dutifully sung. They are played by smiling Max Meth in choked orchestrations. But the "Ziegfeld Follies" cannot recapture the glamour of another era. They are entitled to respectable retirement now.

Perhaps the formula of the big, brassy Broadway revue is obsolete, quite apart from the "Ziegfeld Follies." The energy is now going into other forms of entertainment.

Daily Mirror

March 2, 1957

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Ziegfeld Follies' Is Beautiful But Dumb

• Beatrice Lillie and Billy De Wolfe are hilarious in sketches.

When you can make the Winter Garden's sturdy walls rock from gales of laughter without speaking a word, you're a genius. And that's just what the incomparable Beatrice Lillie did Friday evening in a sketch called "Milady Dines Alone."

Her pantomimic depiction of an eccentric dowager wrestling with limp stalks of asparagus, an elusive cob of slippery corn and a monstrous lobster would have excited the envy of Marcel Marceau. That was an early high spot in the latest edition of the "Ziegfeld Follies."

• • •

THE NEW ARRIVAL, like many a charmer, is beautiful but kinda dumb. Its wordage and tunes are on the pedestrian side. But our Bea doesn't need the assistance of inspired wits or songsmiths to panic the customers. She just takes what they hand her, and makes it pass for the real thing.

Producers Mark Kroll and Charles Conaway have engaged the clever Billy De Wolfe to help La Lillie goose the extravaganza along. This funny fellow is the victim of mediocre material, too. But you'll find nothing more hilarious the length of the Main Stem than Lillie and De Wolfe, as a pair of garrulous biddies on a super-market spree, swapping the lowdown on TV celebs.

The gilded Lillie also had the first-nighters grabbing their sides, to ease the stitches in them, via take-offs on oriental harem favorites, Japanese Kabuki tragediennes, slap-happy airline hostesses and coy coquettes dishing out June-moon sentimentalities. In the latter, crouched in a silvery crescent on the end of a long boom, she swayed apprehensively over the audience, tossing gawdy garters to eager gallants.

• • •

SINCE SUCH FROLICS must have sprightly stepping, the munificent impresarios have provided it in the persons of Harold Lang and Helen Wood. Their turns and leaps were graceful and dazzling. Jane Morgan, Micki Marlo and Carold Lawrence, a trio of orb-poppers, lent spice to the chansons that fell in their laps. And Jay Marshall filled in with amusing satires on magic.

The new "Ziegfeld Follies" cost a Rajah's ransom to mount. The sumptuous Raoul Pene Du Bois sets and costumes are calculated to put a big dent in the bankroll of a Maecenus. And there are cute ponies and shapely showgirls aplenty to display the revealing creations, and delight the eyes of the proverbial tried businessmen. It all adds up to glamour in the tradition.

In fashioning the spectacle, Kroll and Conaway wisely chose John Kennedy as stager and Max Meth as musical director. Kennedy has set such a fast pace for the proceedings that the critical won't have time to play at being Sarceys or Beerbohms. As for Meth, he's a human dynamo in the pit.

BROADWAY HAS been needing a revue, and now it has a handsome one. If it isn't distinguished, it's lively and lavish. There's only one Beatrice Lillie, and it's got her. Why be carping? Let's be grateful for the fun and beauty that Kroll and Conaway have brought our way.

Manhattan is a happier town for the presence of the beguiling Queen Bea. She is of the musical theatre's aristocracy, of the comedy line royal. And De Wolfe is an accomplished knight of clownery at her court.

Journal-American

March 2, 1957

Scintillating Beatrice Lillie Stops Show

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE ARE really only a couple of kind words which come to mind in connection with the Ziegfeld Follies which opened at the Winter Garden last night: Beatrice Lillie. For if it were not for her incredible antics and mad merriment it is doubtful that the show would have come to town.

What is lacking are the elements that went into the great Follies of the past, the taste and talent, the sense of style and elegance. If it does nothing else this production will be a reminder and a tribute to Ziegfeld's memory; it proves that size and affluence are not enough. This one is big all right, but it is undistinguished.

Disregarding Miss Lillie for the moment (which is something nobody should attempt), the Follies emerges as a series of mild songs, dances and sketches in pretentious mountings.

Pleasant Ballads

The choreography is good but not great, there are some pleasant ballads, a couple of fetching dancing rhythms, the long-stemmed lassies are suitably ravishing, and certainly people like Billy De Wolfe, Jane Morgan, Harold Lang and Helen Wood have established their eminence. But as packaged here the proceedings fall short of fulfillment.

It seemed to me the evening got off to an inept start with a sketch involving Miss Morgan and Billy De Wolfe which clubbed a small double-entendre, anatomical idea to death.

Then there is the usual boy-girl song and dance by Lang, Wood and ensemble, quite pleasant, and then Miss Lillie comes on. It is a scene played with only one other actor and it is called "Milady Dines Alone." It is brilliant.

There is another innocuous bit, and then Miss Lillie returns in a rousing sketch involving an airline hostess who has the single purpose of frightening her passengers, And thus it goes; there are the production numbers, the singles, the tall dolls parading, but it is really only when the star comes back on-stage that the festivities come to life.

Bright Moment

Along the way there are a couple of notable exceptions. A song called "Salesmanship," sung by Jane Morgan, Micki Marlo and Carol Lawrence Lawrence stopped the show, and a big number, "Honorable Mambo," seemed to me the best group effort of the evening. Billy De Wolfe has a bright moment alone with his attack on serious drama, and Harold Lang and Helen Wood are an engaging and capable dance team.

But again it is Miss Lillie, this time riding a moon which is swung over the audience, who really revives the show's closing stanza.

To be brutally blunt, I didn't think either the costumes or the decor were ravishing in the extreme. Maybe the whole trouble is being stuck with the name "Ziegfeld Follies".

Why don't they just call it "An Evening With Beatrice Lillie"?

New York Post

March 3, 1957

By Richard Watts Jr.

Concentration on Beatrice Lillie

It is not exactly a secret that Beatrice Lillie is the world's funniest lady comic, and nothing takes place in the course of the revue boldly called "Ziegfeld Follies," which opened Friday night at the Winter Garden, to contradict this dogmatic judgment of her status. When Miss Lillie toys with a stalk of asparagus, manicures a lobster, or introduces us to the mysteries of Kabuki, she is a delight, and, when she swings out over the audience on a moon, tossing garters to various lucky enthusiasts, we are being permitted to share in a joyful esthetic experience.

Since this "Follies" brings Beatrice Lillie back to her starved addicts after far too long a delay, my gratitude to it is so boundless that I feel like an ingrate to start growing captious. Looking around, therefore, for other kind words to say, I can report pleasantly on several matters, such as that Billy de Wolfe is an expert and ingratiating comedian, Harold Lang and Helen Wood are delightful dancers, and Jay Marshall is a sleight-of-hand expert with an easy manner of humorous underplaying. Then, there is a likable young singer named Carol Lawrence.

It may be said furthermore that the revue at the Winter Garden makes a conscientious effort to resemble the original "Ziegfeld Follies" in spirit and manner. Long-limbed show girls stroll about in elaborate costumes, the musical numbers are also elaborate in a stately and old-fashioned way, the settings are studiously colorful, and, occasionally, an actor appears for a moment in a makeup that is apparently intended to remind us surviving veterans from Florenz Ziegfeld's day of, say, Will Rogers or Gallagher and Shean. I suppose it comes under the head of nostalgia.

Unfortunately, while the determination and good will are there, the quality is missing. In the authentic "Follies," the long-limbed girls, the elaborate costumes and the stately numbers resulted in style and beauty. In the current version, there is an unhappy absence of both virtues. And, even if my old memories conceivably cause me to idealize the late Mr. Ziegfeld's extravaganzas, I am still forced to believe that the present revue is colorful without being beautiful, that the songs are unimpressive, and that the mood is surprisingly lackluster.

Despite the lavishness of the production and the number of writers brought in to make their contributions, it is the work of the individual performers that gives the "Follies" what interest it possesses. It is tremendously funny when Miss Lillie, without speaking a word, has that meal which includes the asparagus and the lobster, or when Mr. de Wolfe tells about his doomed aspirations toward being a serious actor, but the sketches in which the two of them appear are, in general, humorous only because they are pushed into oblivion by such expert technicians.

Nevertheless, remembering how good it is to have Miss Lillie with us again, I'd like to get back to the fact that it is sheer joy to see her riding about on that moon, that Mr. de Wolfe can handle a comic monologue with the best of them, that Mr. Marshall's dry manner is authentically droll, and that it is a pleasure to see Mr. Lang and Miss Wood dance. In view of how admirable all five of them are, the elaborate production numbers seem nothing but stage waits. Let's forget about this "Ziegfeld Follies." Let's just concentrate on Beatrice Lillie.

"A Hole in the Head"

Daily Mirror

March 1, 1957

Robert Coleman's ***THEATRE:***

'Hole in the Head' Is Ingratiating Frolic

• Paul Douglas stars in this warming insight into human hearts and behavior.

When it comes to plot, "A Hole in the Head" is as light as a pate with a big one in it. But that doesn't really matter, for Arnold Schulman has created amusing characters who speak a believable lingo. The gags come naturally, and are calculated to garner laughs from customers who don't object to solid yaks.

Schulman is concerned with a ne'er-do-well who shoots for the big, fast bucks, and lets the little, slow ones elude his pocket. Currently he's running a dump of a motel in Miami Beach right into the hands of his creditors. So, as usual, when the pressure is on, he yelps for help from his well-heeled brother Max.

MAX, THE SUCCESSFUL head of a large family, has made his pile from notions stores. He and his wife Sophie have seen their boys grow up, and would like to have the errant Sidney's precocious youngster ride the bicycles they've stored in the attic and have a normal life.

A bargain is inevitable. Max and Sophie will launch a small-town store for Sidney if he'll find a wife and settle down. Sophie even has the right girl for him, an attractive and lonely young widow who knows how to give a tang to chopped liver and sweet-and-sour cabbage.

The idea appeals to Sidney for a while, but he doesn't really want to be fenced in. He can't see himself in a five-and-dime in the backwoods, waiting for a yokel to buy a spool of thread. Anyway, when junior decides that his pop needs him more than his uncle and aunt, Max and Sophie leave a check to meet the more pressing bills—and the widow's address, just in case,—before flying back to New York.

Director Garson Kanin has assembled a swell cast for this amiable comedy, and puts it through its paces with skill. Paul Douglas is as right as a cashable ticket on the daily double at Hialeah as the likeable, footloose Sidney. He's the kind of guy who can prove as irritating as a sand fly, and as winning as any generous glad-hander.

DAVID BURNS, as the crotchety, dyspeptic Max, and Kay Medford as the Sophie who welcomes a happy moment with a freshet of tears, are terrific. They argue, bluster, nag and cajole, with explosive results. Top-flight rib-wreckers, both!

Tommy White, as the kid who likes to read weighty books and can keep an accurate set of them for dad's motel, proves one of the most engaging juveniles to hit the boards in recent semesters.

Lee Grant, as the widow who wants a man around the house and is willing to compromise for companionship, has effectively moving sequences. Her touch is sensitive and sure. Joyce Van Patten is an eyeful as a lush blonde not averse to her landlord's company at 3 a.m.

Now, if you are looking for deep thought in the theatre, pass right by the Plymouth's door. But if you're willing to settle for a warming insight into human hearts and behavior, you do need "A Hole in the Head." Come to think of it, this ingratiating frolic has a lot of depth beneath its disarming and hilarious surface.

BORIS ARONSON has designed for Producers Theatre a fittingly gaudy replica of a shoddy tropical Shangri-La. Moving on a merry-go-round-like turntable, it keeps the laughs and heartbreaks spinning out a riotous rigadoon.

"A HOLE IN THE HEAD"

Play in two acts and six scenes by Arnold Schulman; staged by Garson Kanin; designed by Boris Aronson; lighting by Jean Rosenthal; costumes by Patton Campbell; produced by Robert Whitehead; presented by the Producers Theatre at the Plymouth Theatre, February 28, 1957. The cast:

Frank.....Milton J. Williams
Tina.....Louise Erickson
Mr. Goldblatt.....Jacob Mestel
Ally.....Tommy White
Mrs. Fessler....Connie Sawyer
Herbert.....Larry Hart
Mr. Diamond..Morris Strassberg
Lenny.....Tom Pedi
Shirl.....Joyce Van Patten
Sidney.....Paul Douglas
Max.....David Burns
Sophie.....Kay Medford
Mrs. Rogers.....Lee Grant

DAILY NEWS

March 1, 1957

'Hole in the Head' a Folk Playlet About Dollars and Sex in Florida

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Arnold Schulman's play, "A Hole in the Head," which the Producers Theatre mounted very handsomely at the Plymouth Theatre last evening, is a folk comedy whose locale is Miami Beach, Fla. I am unable to divine the author's intent—whether he was writing a satiric play or a sentimental one—but I can report that it took alternate spells of boring me and irritating me most of the evening.

One discovers that Paul Douglas is a beefy widower with a small son, Tommy White. He is trying to make a go of a small hotel, but like a small hotel without a wishing well it ain't doing so good, and he would like a loan of $5,000 from his successful elder brother, Max.

An Easy Choice

Since Max is played by David Burns, there is considerable humor in Max's reluctance to part from a buck—but not enough to keep a play alive for a whole evening. There are only so many jokes about money and loans—and they don't add up to very many.

Sundry other complications help only a little. Douglas is dallying with a guest in his place, a tomato attractively played by Joyce Van Patten, when Brother Burns fetches him a real nice-type woman, gently and sweetly played by Lee Grant. With Miss Grant, Douglas could have a good home and a fine new mother for his little boy. Instead he chooses to keep his shoestring Shangri-La and the kid bravely stays with him. The one with the hole in the head is, in my opinion, the boy.

Sunny Setting

Under Garson Kanin's direction, the performances are natural and the characters are as convincing as the author will allow them to be. Kay Medford turns in a sharp, dry characterization as Brother Burns' wife, and Tommy White is completely self-possessed and quite resourceful as the small son. Douglas does his part absolutely straight, as if he believed it. Since this is a hotel, sundry other actors wander in and out and up and down.

Boris Aronson has designed a multi-level, multi-room hotel which is so sunny and attractive that I can't imagine anybody needing a $5,000 loan on it. But perhaps I missed the point of the play.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

March 1, 1957

A Few Laughs, A Few Holes

By TOM DONNELLY.

Arnold Schulman's "A Hole in the Head" (at the Plymouth) has a number of effective passages, some aimed at comedy, some at pathos, and the performance is generally skillful, but I can't see that the business adds up to anything in particular.

To borrow a line from one of the characters, the play is about a father, a widower, who is "a little boy at 42" and a son who is "a man at 12." The setting is a sleazy hotel in Miami Beach.

The father, Sidney, is painfully aware that he ought to settle down and become a solid citizen, and now and again he talks grandly about getting a large, shiny new refrigerator and stocking it with frozen vegetables and milk, and making his boy consume these estimable viands. But Sidney is such a bad hotel manager, and so incompetent in a businesss way, that he must be supported by the more industrious members of his family, and his dreams of propriety have no real hold on him.

Actually Sidney just wants to play around with handsomely assembled blondes, and wear gaudy clothes, and evade responsibility as if it were a tiger in his path.

Convincing Relationship.

His son, Ally, has pretty much accepted this state of affairs when the play opens, and he is still accepting it when the play ends. It may not be true that the characters in any really satisfactory drama must be brought to a new estimate of themselves and their situation, or stumble upon some blinding truth, or be otherwise transformed, but in the specific case of "A Hole in the Head" the prevailing impression is one of waste motion.

The outstanding virtue of Mr. Schulman's work is its presentation of the father-son relationship. This is warm, and wry, and convincing, and it is most engagingly handled by Paul Douglas, who has no peer when it comes to portraying amiable roughnecks, and by Tommy White. Master White is called upon to be solemn, efficient, and gently tolerant of his wayward parent, and he does it all with charm, and ease, and no trace of that unbearable condescension which is likely to show up in the work of juvenile artists entrusted with assignments of this forbidding nature.

Now, along the way Sidney's brother and sister-in-law turn up, atremble with fear for the boy's future, and eager to fix Sidney up with a widow both solvent and respectable. Certain disconcerting elements emerge here. For one thing, David Burns and Kay Medford, who play the visiting relatives, make it abundantly clear that the family we are surveying is Jewish, and this is something Mr. Douglas has not remotely suggested. I suppose you could put this down to confusion in the casting department.

Distasteful Scene.

For another thing, Mr. Burns, who begins the evening in a brave, broad comic style that fits comfortably enough into the framework of the play, gets progressively broader, and ends up behaving as if he were performing a solo burlesque in a revue.

Mr. Burns is supposed to be interpreting a plain, blunt man, but the scene wherein he cross-questions the widow on her financial status is noisy and distasteful, a failure on the part of both the actor, and the playwright, who obviously intended to create a "strong" episode but failed to appreciate that there are degrees in these things, and sometimes a little is better than a lot.

Indeed, director Garson Kanin, who has staged the bulk of "A Hole in the Head" expertly enough, has slipped up surprisingly on some of the details. Why, for example, has he encouraged Lee Grant, the widow in the case, to totter wanly about, clutching at the furniture for support? There must be subtler ways to indicate that a lady feels forlorn and at loose ends.

Miss Medford's acting is above reproach, and Joyce Van Patten gets a lot out of the role of the highly available blonde on the premises.

The New York Times

March 1, 1957

Theatre: Tender, Humorous Drama

'A Hole in the Head' Is Staged at Plymouth

By BROOKS ATKINSON

OUT of some commonplaces of American life, Arnold Schulman has composed a tender and humorous drama, "A Hole in the Head," which was put on at the Plymouth last evening.

Put on beautifully, moreover. If it were not acted with taste, it could be as commonplace as its material. For it is the saga of middle-class people destitute of originality, and absorbed in the ordinary things of life. The man with a hole in the head is a dime a dozen in this opportunistic land. His relatives are as common as old shoes.

●

But Garson Kanin has staged "A Hole in the Head" with respect for the human decencies that lie just behind the vernacular. The performance has tone. The movement has a sort of counterpoint design of vulgarity, compassion, rage and affection. And the acting by Paul Douglas, as the amiable charlatan, and all the actors is both rude and sensitive—the manners rude, the insights sensitive.

Inside one of Boris Aronson's most illuminating sets, the performance of "A Hole in the Head" is triumphantly homely and honest. It gives fine expression to plain ideas, and makes the theatre look like part of the living record of mankind.

●

All that goes on really is that a rolling stone keeps on rolling. The program describes him only as Sidney. He is a widower with a son whom he loves and a Miami hotel that he mismanages. To stave off his creditors he telephones his most prosperous brother in New York for a loan of $5,300. To make his plea irresistible he throws in a vague lie about the health of the boy.

And this sets off a temperamental tornado. Down comes the brother from New York with his wife to rescue the boy from a negligent upbringing. Amid the fury everything happens at once—a project to marry the rolling stone to a widow, to set him up in a safe business in a country town away from the glamour of Miami, to whisk the boy back to New York where he can be looked after properly.

The events, however, are secondary to the disarming decency of the characters. They are the kind that God must love because he has made so many. This is where the glory of the acting comes into the foreground. Everything the actors do seems comically familiar and true. Mr. Douglas' bluffing, shifty black sheep of the family is obviously a good egg. There's not a mean bone in his body.

David Burns as the prosperous brother from New York is the epitome of noisy vulgarity—a non-stop shouter of bromides, a man full of rage about the inequities of life, a man totally without taste, and funny in those terms. But he is also a man of sentiment in the tight corners. Kay Medford's highly emotional, overbearing wife is a torrent of family devotion. As the son, who at 12 is more mature than his father of 42, Tommy White gives a manly, touching performance.

●

As the widow, Lee Grant gives an admirable performance in a lower key of reticence, hesitation and candor. Joyce Van Patten plays the part of a reckless blonde with an undertone of genuine emotion that is affecting.

Everybody is in good form in "A Hole in the Head." Mr. Schulman has drawn his portrait with impetuosity and understanding. Under Mr. Kanin's direction the actors transmute it into one of the most endearing and delightful comedies of recent years.

Journal American

March 1, 1957

Douglas Plus Brilliant Cast Have Winner

By JOHN McCLAIN

A SERIES OF TRULY brilliant performances and the artful direction of Garson Kanin result in what I think will be a solid success for "A Hole in the Head." This is a comedy by Arnold Schulman, starring Paul Douglas, which was presented at the Plymouth Theatre last night.

This is a triumph of the techniques of professional theatre over a wispy story: the roles are expertly cast, the timing is exact and the final fluid of pathos and humor is drained from every small scene. The result is often hilarious and frequently touching. It seems to me to have the elements which will attract a large segment of the citizens; the opening night audience howled and sniffled and appeared to enjoy itself enormously.

Douglas portrayes a widowed keeper of a Florida hotel, torn between his affection for his small son, his steady pursuit of blondes, and the demands of his creditors. When, in desperation, he summons his affluent elder brother to help him out of an immediate financial crisis, he is faced with losing the custody of his boy—and hence derives the schmaltz.

In this role the star is back in the familiar groove he occupied so long in "Born Yesterday"—the blustering, boastful illiterate—and he establishes the fact that his potential as an actor is no accident. He has notable size and power, but he also has a subtle sense of execution which can be enormously funny and very moving.

A Wonderful Boy

Throughout the evening he is brilliantly abetted by a sprout named Tommy White, one of the apparently endless army of youngsters who make precocious bows on Broadway every season. This one is a solid standout, with enough lines to tax the memory of a Van Doren. He is merely wonderful.

Added to all this there are the fabulous services of David Burns and Kay Medford, who play the brother and wife. He is the crotchety industrialist whose balance can be upset by things like ice cubes with holes built in; and Miss Medford—well, there is still nobody around who can handle a comedy line with greater skill.

Lee Grant, another highly capable and experienced actress, has a rather unrewarding role which she plays expertly; and Joyce Van Patten, a most ravishing young blonde, performs far beyond the requirements of her structure. She is a truly promising comedienne.

Effective Set

Boris Aronson has contrived to get most of his small hotel into a single set which revolves slightly while the action is in progress, giving the audience a different perspective and centering on the point of interest. This worked without mishap and was generally effective.

Kanin, as mentioned, performed an outstanding job in maintaining the pace and bringing excitement to scenes which might have been pedestrian in less skilled hands.

"A Hole in the Head," for which Douglas gave up a couple of movie offers, should prove that he doesn't have one in his.

New York Post

March 1, 1957

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Value of Good Performances

"A Hole in the Head" is a scattered and rather ramshackle comedy that is brightened by several immensely entertaining performances. Although the new play by Arnold Schulman, which opened last night at the Plymouth Theater, has its decided ups and downs, and sometimes seems to be stretched out laboriously, there is always the hearty vitality of Paul Douglas or the delightful comic gusto and warmth of David Burns and Kay Medford to give it humor and an air of believable humanity, with the result that its fairly mechanical framework is but mildly disturbing.

It is those performances, backed up by Garson Kanin's brisk staging and Boris Aronson's interestingly detailed setting of a run-down Miami Beach hotel, that give "A Hole in the Head" its lifesaving entertainment value. Mr. Douglas, as the hotel's impecunious and dunderheaded proprietor, makes the worthless though likable fellow's love for his son strangely appealing, while Mr. Burns and Miss Medford, as his helpful but thoroughly exasperated brother and sister-in-law, are enormously humorous without ever losing the important quality of complete credibility.

In fact, the exasperated and imposed-upon relatives are so hilariously portrayed that they come very close to stealing the show. If Mr. Douglas didn't bring that disarming and oddly likable vitality of his to his role, the wonderfully comic playing of Mr. Burns and Miss Medford would have made the unsuccessful hotel proprietor seem a very secondary figure in the proceedings. Even as it is, these two fine performers are so steadily entertaining that their desperate and somewhat clumsy efforts to rescue the brother become the focal point of Mr. Schulman's play.

So far as the plot goes, however, "A Hole in the Head" is primarily concerned with the brother's devotion to his son. He knows that the boy needs a mother, and he is perfectly willing in theory to give him one by marrying a pretty and lonely widow, but the father's roving eye and desire for independence are always getting in the way. Furthermore, there is the free and easy girl in the upstairs room to distract his interest, and altogether he finds it difficult to settle down and be a family man despite his occasional good intentions.

The comedy certainly doesn't suffer from any absence of funny lines, and there are such incidental details as a mysterious lady, who leaves the hotel sedately every evening and returns in the morning in a high state of alcoholic exuberance, to add to the entertainment. But there are times when the narrative does seem mechanical and the story appears stretched out just to keep the final curtain from descending. It is at these dangerous moments that the comic performances rush to the rescue, and they are fortunately not in vain.

Although the three players I seem to keep mentioning dominate the evening, there are other helpful portrayals, particularly by Lee Grant as the nice widow and Joyce Van Patten as the girl who distracts the proprietor's attention. And young Tommy White is credible, if not always quite articulate, as the son who is in favor of his father remarrying. "A Hole in the Head" didn't seem to me a satisfying comedy in its own right, but, as a springboard for the playing of Mr. Douglas, Mr. Burns and Miss Medford, it works out surprisingly well.

New York Herald Tribune

March 1, 1957

THEATER

'A Hole in the Head'

By WALTER KERR

IT SEEMS to me that playwright Arnold Schulman comes within a hair's-breadth of what he's shooting for just twice during the domestic flare-ups of "A Hole in the Head."

The first occurs toward the end of a sometimes lazy, sometimes frantic first act. Paul Douglas, as a Miami hotel proprietor who's still a small boy at the age of forty-two, strolls out onto the terrace to have a scrappy little conversation with his son, who happens to be a grown man at twelve.

The boy is sulky, and Douglas is sulkier. Relatives have been trying to get the old man hitched up with a new wife, the girl he's been seeing in one of the upstairs rooms is beginning to smell a rat, and it's occurred to both father and son that daddy isn't exactly the fellow to be raising a motherless lad ("It's three o'clock in the morning, when you gonna eat your supper?").

But somehow or other the sullenness subsides. For no very good reason except that two people have started to talk frankly and easily to one another, Mr. Douglas begins to remember the wife who has died too soon, to wonder why she should have been snatched away from some one who obviously needed her so badly, and to confess to his son what a chump he is. For a moment or two, there's a gentle honesty in the air that is lightly touching.

• • •

The note is struck again—just as effectively—in a second-act stretch that brings the flailing and frustrated Mr. Douglas into head on collision with the available widow who's been picked out for him. Lee Grant is the girl in the case, demure and evasive in a handsome blue gown that Patton Campbell has whipped up for her, and she has a few surprises in store for us. From the time that she cagily watches this prospective suitor out of the corner of her eye while he rambles on in overhearty conversation, to the stinging fraction of a second when she digs her fingers into a sofa-back and blurts out the humiliation she feels at being alone (she hates having to walk into a grocery store and order one lamb chop, and she's gone for two days at a time without speaking to a single living soul), Miss Grant is quite wonderful. The strain, the candor, and the yearning that won't stop no matter how candid she is are all fused into a single bitter, proud, yet wistful image.

But the problem of fusing images, of putting all sorts of diverse shadings and inflections together, is what sorely besets the rest of the play. Mr. Schulman has begun with a kind of Saroyanesque father-son relationship (of the "My Heart's in the Highlands" vintage) and then veered off into the semi-dialect family maneuverings of Paddy Chayefsky's "Middle of the Night."

• • •

And in the course of his uncertain wanderings, the people who weave in and out of Boris Aronson's handsome but curiously overcrowded hotel simply refuse to mix.

Kay Medford, the girl with the penetrating eyes and the voice of a steam-boiler getting ready to expire, comes on to throw her arms about the neglected lad and to make mournful mother-cries at every turn of events. Miss Medford is a shrewd comedienne, an excellent straight actress, and I admire everything she did; but I couldn't for a moment imagine where she came from. The vision of this trim, bangled, and salty powerhouse making matronly noises somewhere out in the suburbs remains a wildly defiant one.

And David Burns, wrestling his way through vaudeville routines with an invisible opponent, winding himself up into self-starting apoplectic furies, seems to come from much too definite a place: the Palace.

On the sidelines young Tommy White gives a subdued, legitimate performance while Joyce van Patten claws at her male friends with stylized abandon.

I don't think it's the players who have failed to find common ground to meet, and mate, on. Mr. Schulman's scripts leads them hither and yon, tossing them talented fragments of a genre play that is not quite sure of its genre. The bits and pieces are often independently interesting. The hole is the center.

"The Taming of the Shrew"

New York Post

February 21, 1957

By Richard Watts Jr.

An Excellent 'Taming of the Shrew'

The theory that "The Taming of the Shrew" requires Cole Porter's score to make it entertaining to modern audiences is effectively combatted by the American Shakespeare Festival's presentation of the comedy. At the Phoenix Theater last night, the production of the play that inspired "Kiss Me, Kate" proved to be every bit as gay, fresh and brightly imaginative as it seemed in Stratford, Conn., during the summer, which means that it turns the familiar Elizabethan prank into an excellent show.

Of course, no one can deny the impact that Mr. Porter's musical comedy has had on "The Taming of the Shrew." When Petruchio says, "I've come to wive it wealthily in Padua" or just "Kiss me, Kate," and Katherina declares, "I'm ashamed that women are so simple," you are likely not only to find yourself thinking it's a song cue, but to begin accusing Shakespeare of plagiarism. But, even without the music, the old play continues to be remarkably good entertainment when done with zest and gaiety.

Happily, these are exactly the qualities that have gone into the production at the Phoenix. Since, in addition to the familiarity of the story, the comedy does have a way of getting bogged down in its subplots, this requires a certain amount of doing, and it is here that Norman Lloyd's direction has been so helpful. For Mr. Lloyd has come up with a fine inventiveness in the creation of unashamed gags, and the performance moves along with a cheerful prankishness and in a briskly comic spirit.

If the staging has just the proper mood and style to be spirited and enlivening, so have the portrayals of the leading roles. By playing Petruchio as a somewhat seedy adventurer, who frankly enjoys his conquest of the bullied Kate and is slightly surprised at the completeness of his victory, Pernell Roberts makes the role believable as well as vital and humorous, and the dashing bully becomes far more engaging than he usually seems. There is no doubt of Mr. Roberts' brilliance as a Shakespearean actor.

Nina Foch is also delightful as the vanquished lady. Miss Foch has spirit and humor, and she is admirable in her early scenes of sullen rebellion. But she is even better in the scenes of her humiliation, making them curiously touching in her bewildered discomfiture. Shakespeare probably never wrote a speech that sounds more unconvincing to an audience of today than the one in which Kate concedes a husband's superiority, but Miss Foch saves even this by combining humor with the abjectness.

The supporting roles are effectively managed, too, and I especially liked Mike Kellin's Christopher Sly, Richard Easton's Lucentio, Mitchell Agruss' Tranio, Jerry Stiller's Biondello, Kendall Clark's Hortensio, Barbara Lord's Bianco, and Ellis Rabb's pedant. I missed the amazingly fresh humor Fritz Weaver gave the ancient Grumio last summer, but Philip Bourneuf is satisfactory in the part. It may surprise you to find what a fresh and engaging comedy "The Taming of the Shrew" can be.

"THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"

Comedy by William Shakespeare; staged by Norman Lloyd; costumes by Dorothy Jeakins; lighting and additional decor by Jean Rosenthal; music by Irwin Bazelon; festival stage by Rouben Ter-Arutunian; presented by the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy under the direction of John Houseman at the Phoenix Theatre, February 20, 1957. The cast:

Christopher Sly.....Mike Kellin
Hostess.....Pamela Saunders
A Lord.....Louis Edmonds
Bartholomew.....Susan Lloyd
First Player.....Byron Russell
Huntsman and Servant.....Tucker Ashworth
Huntsman and Servant.....William Cottrell
Lucentio.....Richard Easton
Tranio.....Mitchell Agruss
Biodello.....Jerry Stiller
Baptista.....Patrick Hines
Katherina.....Nina Foch
Bianca.....Barbara Lord
Gremio.....Philip Bourneuf
Hortensio.....Kendall Clark
Grumio.....Morris Carnovsky
Petruchio.....Pernell Roberts
Curtis.....Rod Colbin
Nathaniel.....James Cahill
Peter...Michael Lindsay-Hogg
Joseph.....Joseph Myers
Nicholas.....David Milton
Sugersop.....Robert Morris

Daily Mirror

February 21, 1957

Robert Coleman's ***THEATRE:***

'Taming of Shrew' A First-Rate Frolic

• Nina Foch and Pernell Roberts star at Phoenix.

The American Shakespeare Festival Theatre shot the works with "The Taming of the Shrew" at the Phoenix Wednesday evening. It was hoked to the hilt, done with great gusto and had winning style. The first-nighters loved it, from start to finish, including the juveniles getting their first taste of the Bard.

Some ivory-tower boys don't think much of "The Shrew." In fact, they won't even admit that Shakespeare penned it. And, as for the Lucy Stoners—ouch! Yet this rollicking comedy has probably caught the fancy of the public and players more often in this century than any work in the repertory.

• • •

EVERY ONCE in a while, we accidently tune in on one of those radio or TV "What do you think?" programs, and the emcee is usually asking, "Who should be boss in the household?" Most of the gals, believe it or not, say, "The Man, of course." But, sagely add that they're really the real boss.

Now, "The Taming of the Shrew" is about a dashing blade from Verona who teaches a willful and spoiled belle of Padua that you can catch more flies with honey than vinegar. No one wanted to marry the violent Kate, even though she brought a handsome dowry, until the virile Petruchio came along.

After he had smacked her around a bit, denied her food, torn up her dresses and taught her to say, "Pretty please," the spirited Katherina became a model of a wife. And, no doubt, Petruchio proved — once he had made his point — an indulgent and pliable husband. Through storm and strife, each learned the other's values.

Director Norman Lloyd has put the bibulous Christopher Sly, for whom the play within a play was given as a joke, back on stage. He has generally been ensconced in a box. Now he watches the proceedings from a balcony in Rouben Ter-Arutunian's plastic grey-colored, Venetian-blind-like setting.

STRATFORD'S GENTLEMAN dramatist probably used the drunken tinker's conduct as a slap on the wrist for the ill-mannered gallants who used to sit on the Globe's platform and annoy the actors. He administered a similar rebuke to the discourteous courtiers in a touching scene in "Love's Labour's Lost."

Nina Foch and Pernell Roberts etch Katherina and Petruchio with relish. Their strokes are broad and effective; their characterizations human and vital. Mike Kellin is a raffish Sly. And there are lusty contributions by Louis Edmonds, Richard Easton, Patrick Hines, Barbara Lord, Philip Bourneuf, Kendall Clark, Morris Carnovsky, Ellis Rabb and Pamela Saunders.

Lloyd has given the clowns their heads, and they offer a field day of slapstick. They bang a musty money-ledger shut—a moth and clouds of dust fly out. They pull stools from under unsuspecting sitters. They use a telescope to read road signs. They really tear up the corn patch, and garner the reward of robust laughter.

So "The Taming of the Shrew" is not Master Will's masterpiece. But it is riotously funny in the resourceful hands of the Festival Theatre's wonderful band of troupers. Since the engagement is a limited one, you'd better not delay a visit to the Phoenix. That is, if you want to give your chuckle apparatus a first-rate workout.

Journal American

February 21, 1957

Sterling Cast In Bard's Lusty Classic of Love

By JOHN McCLAIN

The Phoenix Theatre, again joining forces with The American Shakespeare Festival, last night presented "The Taming of the Shrew" at their premises at Second ave. and 12th st. What they are doing, actually, is bringing to town the repertory and players which John Houseman directed last Summer for the theatre in Stratford, Conn.

Here they are given slightly less freedom of movement, but the production still retains the vigor and abandon of the version offered in the sticks. I doubt that we shall ever see this rather baffling and bawdy classic performed by a more competent cast; its moments of bewilderment are brushed aside in the general clamor and pace of the proceedings.

All-Out for Vitality

FOR IN THE direction Mr. Houseman has apparently gone "all out" for vitality but has still managed to keep a sense of the basic attraction between Katharine and Petruchio without which the play would fall in pieces. We are always aware of this quarrelsome romance, but it does not prevent the others in the company from behaving like grown-up delinquents. This is not my favorite Shakespeare, but it is a thoughtful and memorable interpretation.

Nina Foch is a vivacious and beguiling Katharine. She gives us the feeling, which I believe to be intrinsic in the plot, that she is aware early in the evening that she will eventually nail Petruchio—but she isn't going to make it easy.

Pernell Roberts, on the other hand, plays his Petruchio with gruff masculinity, and it is some time before we see that he is hopelessly hooked. The muscular moments, given recent exploitation in "Kiss Me, Kate," are handled here with admirable tact and timing.

Strong Supporting Cast

I ALSO ENJOYED the contributions of Mike Kellin, Richard Easton, Philip Bourneuf, Morris Carnovsky (who does a cute bit between scenes bidding the audience to get lost), Kendall Clark, Jerry Stiller, Pamela Edmonds, and most of the others in the imposing cast.

Jean Rosenthal has done an excellent job of transposing the Stratford sets to the Phoenix. Players rise up from the orchestra pit, and something that looks like long Venetian blinds serves as an effective background for many of the scenes.

The American Shakespeare Festival people got off to a somewhat shaky start a few seasons ago in their new hall on the Housatonic, but they have come a long way since then. This urban presentation will be a big boost.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 21, 1957

'The Shrew' and I Are Incompatible

By TOM DONNELLY.

They are doing "The Taming of the Shrew" at the Phoenix, and I find myself in a small quandary. I have seen this play performed a dozen times or so, and I'm afraid I don't react to it any more. At least, not very powerfully.

It's probably very conceited of me, but I honestly feel that I long ago absorbed all the subtleties of this work. Take, for example, the scene wherein the brawling Petruchio and the exhausted Katherina sit down to dinner. As you may recall, Katherina is famished, but just as she is about to sink her teeth in the mutton Petruchio snatches the joint away, announcing that it is burnt, and unfit for his bride's palate. He hurls it across the room, and does the same with all the meat.

As I figure it, the inner meaning of this passage is as follows: Petruchio, by behaving in the surly wanton manner of his wife, is giving her a taste of her own medicine. It is one more step in his campaign to break her shrewish spirit, and convert her into a model wife.

That's the outer meaning of the scene, too.

Just One Theory.

Of course, I'm just speaking for myself here. Other people may have alternative theories, possibly more stimulating ones.

Now about the jokes. Petruchio tells Kate, as he calls the heroine of this playlet, not to look so sour. Kate says: "It is my fashion when I see a crab." Petruchio says: "Why, here's no crab, and therefore look not sour." Kate says: "There is, there is." Petruchio says: "Then show it to me." Kate comes right back at him with: "Had I a glass, I would." Petruchio, getting the point, cries: "What, you mean my face?"

The first seven or eight times I heard that one I rolled in the aisles. But no more. Somehow or other the jest has lost its savor for me. It is no doubt presumptuous of me to take such a haughty attitude toward material that has been knocking them dead for hundreds of years, but there you are. "The Taming of the Shrew" and yours truly are not compatible.

Kind of Blueprint.

The performance can make a lot of difference, to be sure. Accept Mr. William Shakespeare's scenario as a kind of blueprint, a master plan to allow actors to glitter with as much brilliance as they can command, and a whole new critical realm opens. How did the actor playing Petruchio hurl that mutton across the room? With a stunning blend of vigor and delicacy? Or with a languid lack of conviction?

The members of the company assembled for the American Shakespeare Festival Theater and Academy version of "The Taming of the Shrew," which is the one at the Phoenix, go about their chores with tremendous acrobatic enthusiasm. They shout the gags out loud and clear, and they seem to have their hearts as well as their muscles in their work. And it is my impression that last night's audience had a wonderful time. "Had the first nighters roaring," they can say in the ads.

Nina Foch is Kate, and Pernell Roberts is Petruchio, and they make a very handsome and energetic couple. The supporting artists are very energetic, too.

The New York Times
February 21, 1957

Theatre: Tedious 'Shrew'

Shakespeare's Comedy Staged at Phoenix

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE "The Taming of the Shrew" is a low comedy antic, anything that is funny belongs. Shakespeare wrote it for the groundlings of every station.

But this leads us to the basic question. Is the Norman Lloyd version, which was acted at the Phoenix last evening, a funny show or a tedious chore? This department is inclined to the latter view.

Mr. Lloyd is the talented comedian who played a delightful Lucio in "Measure for Measure," making something genuinely comic out of unlikely material. Last summer at Stratford, Conn., he also staged "The Taming of the Shrew" in an industriously fantasticated form.

Normal attrition among actors having taken place since the summer, the performance at the Phoenix is not identical. But it retains the Petruchio of Pernell Roberts, the Katherina of Nina Foch and several of the other performers. And Rouben Ter-Arutunian's crisp setting still walls the stage with a Venetian blind motive.

●

As the ringmaster of this circus, Mr. Lloyd is determined not to let the audience suffer a dull moment. Beginning with the Christopher Sly induction, he keeps his actors tumbling around the stage, taking ten steps on every line, gagging as they go. It is the rock 'n' roll tempo applied to Shakespeare. The movement is desperately strenuous. The vocal tones are boisterous. The clowning is vehement and breathless.

If Mr. Lloyd's clowns were really comic, the performance might be as uproarious as he intends it to be. But his clowns are only pleasant mummers who hope that their innocence may be comic. And the plot and the dialogue—such as they are—get mauled under the director's hurly-burly.

●

Mr. Lloyd's method of overdirection has one happy effect. It makes a theatregoer especially grateful for the poised, honestly humorous acting of Mr. Roberts as Petruchio. Mr. Roberts knows what he is doing, which is a comforting thing to hold on to amid the bedlam.

Although Miss Foch is not ideally cast as Katherina, her evil temper being only a surface manner, her final speech in praise of husbands is droll and charming because the rest of the cast settles down and lets her speak it. A word from Shakespeare is always reassuring in a play that bears his name.

Two of the other actors are able to slip a little acting style into a generally diffuse performance. Morris Carnovsky, always an able trouper, puts a solid foundation of humor under the part of Grumio. As Bianca, Barbara Lord is romantically mischievous and gay.

But the constant running, tripping, brawling and roaring overwhelm the intelligible moments in the performance. The taming of the director would be the first step toward taming Shakespeare's shrew.

New York Herald Tribune
February 21, 1957

THEATER

'The Taming of the Shrew'

By WALTER KERR

DURING one of the intermissions of Wednesday night's "Taming of the Shrew" at the Phoenix, the management sent Mr. Hiram Sherman before the footlights to say a few words on behalf of the American Shakespeare Festival Theater of Connecticut. This may have been a serious mistake.

For Mr. Sherman has a naturally funny mind, and he cannot mention the summer route to our local Stratford without pointing out that it is "not to be confused with spurious Stratfords in other countries" any more than he can touch on Shakespeare himself without turning him into an all-American, family-entertainment boy. I'm not doing justice to Mr. Sherman's wry irreverence here, but the upshot of the whole interlude is that Mr. Sherman gets more laughs in three minutes than a company of twenty-nine does in two-and-one-half hours. He reminds you, scoundrel that he is, what a really big guffaw is—and the contrast is embarrassing.

Not that those ardent twenty-nine aren't giving their all to entertain you with everything in the shop. When Nina Foch (Kate) hoists her foot in the air to plant a resounding kick on Petruchio's exposed rear, Petruchio (Pernell Roberts) grabs her ankle and keeps her hopping there through a very long speech. When Gremio (Philip Bourneuf) gets down on his hands and knees to trace his lady-finger of a nose across a parchment drooped on the floor, someone whips the parchment away so that he can bump his noggin on the ground. (Later Mr. Bourneuf is caught outside the curtains during an act-break.)

Petruchio loudly cracks walnuts while he dispenses wedding-night philosophy, Kate takes a sizable chew out of the woodwork, Christopher Sly (Mike Kellin) swoops a long net down out of his perch on the balcony to steal an old pedant's flask of firewater, messenger Jerry Stiller takes no fewer than six falls during one recited message, and when someone opens a mouldy old book the customary clouds of dust—plus a single errant moth—fly out.

In a manner of speaking, director Norman Lloyd hasn't missed a trick: chairs are pulled out from under actors who are about to sit on them, a cash register chimes merrily somewhere offstage, and the customary assortment of low comedy servants—the kind who can only be distinguished from one another by the length of hair in their eyes—tumble all over the place. The stage business is fast, complicated, and omnipresent.

Why doesn't it build up to more than an occasional titter? Because the balance of the company, unlike Mr. Sherman, has no secret amusement, no personal humor, no aimed-at comic image stored away at the back of its collective mind. The "Shrew" is certainly not sacrosanct among Shakespeare's plays; when it works, it works because actors have done something inventive with it. But the invention of these particular players is wholly physical, noisy and irrelevant. There's nary a gleam in a Paduan eye.

Nina Foch is at her best in the demure final speech of mocking surrender; the rest of the time she is just following her fists. Pernell Roberts, looking rather like Sir Francis Drake, makes a few casual feints pay off, but keeps his vocal tone mysteriously lower than the bravura energy of his body; the result is a curiously blurred picture. Morris Carnovsky, Ellis Rabb, Richard Easton and William Cottrell threaten to brighten things up every now and then—but the dash that is suggested in Dorothy Jeakins' costumes and the constant bustle of hard-breathing supernumeraries can never be sustained for long. The wrestling match is there, but the wink is missing.

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

February 21, 1957

Lively, Lusty 'Taming of Shrew' Staged at the Phoenix Theatre

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Stratford-on-the-Housatonic enterprise which labors under the heavy and cheerless name of the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy has been wintering down south here at 12th St. and Second Ave. Last evening, at the Phoenix Theatre, this lively group of bardolators offered the same lusty "Taming of the Shrew" which pleased Connecticut customers last summer.

It was just about the same, at any rate, except for a cast change or two, and under Norman Lloyd's disrespectful direction it was played with zest, zazz and ping. As enjoyable a "Shrew" as you could find anywhere without calling on Cole Porter for some lyrics and melodies.

Sequels Needed

Nina Foch makes an admirable shrew because she is healthy enough and handsome enough to offer a challenge to the bravest of wife-tamers—and she is an able farcical comedienne besides.

Matching her admirably in enthusiasm and drive is Pernell Roberts as Petruchio. Petruchio may have been the first and least tiresome of a long and tiresome line of fortune-hunting husbands, and it is too bad that Shakespeare dropped him just after he got started. Petruchio, the businesslike playboy, should have been given a few divorces, a few more wives and several more farces.

The ASFTAA company is picturesque and good throughout. Philip Bourneuf has stuck a long putty nose into the role of Gremio with amusing effect, and there are sound performances by Morris Carnovsky, Patrick Hines, Barbara Lord, Kendall Clark, James Cahill and several others.

The Ideal Drunk

As he was last summer in Stratford, Mike Kellin is Christopher Sly, the drunkard's drunkard. In the role of the besotted tinker before whom this impossible fable of the taming of a shrew is played, Kellin lurches into view with the tools of his handyman's trade on his person. Hung from his neck is a candle mold, and last evening this contraption struck me as a merry inspiration.

The whole play is a merry inspiration anyhow, from Shakespeare to Norman Lloyd.

"Le Chien du Jardinier" & "Les Adieux"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 19, 1957

The French Make A Grand Exit

By TOM DONNELLY.

It is said that Lope de Vega, the Spanish dramatist, wrote approximately 1600 plays. I daresay Charles Van Doren could quote you the punch-lines of all of them.

My own acquaintance with Lope's works is severely limited, and I plan to keep it that way.

Of course, I may have stumbled on the wrong samples. Maybe the other 1594 specimens would have me laughing and crying and pounding my fists. "Le Chien du Jardinier," the final offering of the French season at the Winter Garden, is generally considered to be one of Lope's masterpieces, I believe.

Good Play? Well. . .

Let's put it this way. "The Gardener's Dog" is not my favorite play in all the world, but if we had to have it, we could not possibly have had it done better. Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault and their company are extraordinarily versatile performers, and they can put a light, bright shine on almost anything.

The heroine of "The Gardener's Dog" is the Countess Diane de Belflor, a minx who spends a large share of her time in "a frenzy of disdain."

Having discovered that Theodore, her secretary, is enamored of Marcelle, one of her ladies in waiting, the countess decides to appropriate him for herself. Theodore allows himself to be appropriated, the countess drops him, Marcelle picks him up again, the countess decides she wants him again, Theodore capitulates, the countess changes her mind again.

The Heavy Touch.

Things proceed in this fashion for rather a long time. Such monumental caprices! Such cynical gambling with human hearts!

There are those who will tell you that Lope manages this artificial plot with a witty grace reminiscent of the William Shakespeare who wrote "Twelfth Night." If you want my opinion, I'd say that Lope handles it with a leaden touch reminiscent of the William Shakespeare who write "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

To be sure, it is in English translation that I know Lope best. In Spanish he may be fresh as a hothouse daisy. The Renaud-Barrault company offers him in a version by Georges Neveux, and it is my impression that this version does improve upon the source.

Or perhaps the relatively sprightly tone of the evening is due entirely to the magic of the acting. Mme. Renaud is the countess, M. Barrault is the secretary, and it is a pleasure to watch them fizz and flutter, and glide across the stage. The supporting artists are uniformly excellent.

Hurray for Troupe.

In the second part of the bill, the various members of the company offer a kind of montage of bits and characters from the plays which have made up their season at the Winter Garden, and M. Barrault offers a few of his more popular pantomimes, most notably his remarkably inventive and amusing study of a horse show. An altogether charming finale.

"LE CHIEN DU JARDINIER" and "LES ADIEUX"

"Le Chien du Jardinier" A play by Lope de Vega, adapted by Georges Neveux; settings and costumes by Jean-Denis Malcles; staged by Jean-Louis Barrault; presented by Sol Hurok under the auspices of the Government of the French Republic at the Winter Garden Theatre, February 18, 1957.

The cast:

Theodore...Jean-Louis Barrault
Tristan....Jean-Pierre Granval
Countess Diane de Belflor....
Madeleine Renaud
Fabio.....Gabriel Cattand
Octavio.....Georges Cusin
Marcelle.....Simone Valere
Assunta.....Natalie Nerval
Dorothee.....Francoise Ledoux
Marquis Ricardo....Andre Jobin
Count Frederic.....Regis Outin
Leonido.....Jean Lancelot
Celio.....Emile Noel
Antonio.....Jean Juillard
Count Ludovic.....Pierre Bertin
Camille.....Jacques Galland
Furio.....Gerard Dournel

"Les Adieux" Jean-Louis Barrault master of ceremonies, introduces the various members of his company who entertain. He offers new pantomime sequence with Baptiste.

New York Post

February 19, 1957

By Richard Watts Jr.

Final Bill of Barrault's Company

Jean-Louis Barrault's distinguished acting company from Paris offered the final bill of its highly successful American season at the Winter Garden last night, and the program ranged all the way from a comedy by Georges Neveux, adapted from an old play by Lope de Vega, to M. Barrault reciting in English an appropriate section of Abraham Lincoln's farewell address to his neighbors in Springfield. It was a pleasant occasion, and it supplied a fitting conclusion to a very happy engagement.

"Le Chien du Jardinier," which, as you doubtless know better than I do, would be called in English "The Gardener's Dog," is the major item of the evening. It is the sort of brightly artificial comedy in which the visitors' style is shown at its best, and M. Barrault, Madeleine Renaud, Simone Valere and the other players frolic about in it with gaiety, skill and wonderful comic vitality. They have the agreeable faculty of seeming to enjoy themselves without losing their professional touch.

The Flourish

Give them the colorful costumes of a distant day, in which they can act with a merry flourish, and they are sure to appear so at home that you might easily think these were the clothes of their ordinary existence — if, of course, they can be said to have an ordinary existence. This, however, seems doubtful in view of the way in which brightness of style and dash of manner give evidence of being second nature to them. No actors could be more at ease amid the pitfalls of artificial comedy.

There is certainly nothing unusual about the materials of "Le Chien du Jardinier." The dashing and somewhat rascally secretary, the lady of title who loves him, the coquettish serving maid, the belligerent noblemen, and the comically addled old man of the plot are familiar stock figures of such a work, and they don't do anything surprising to one who has ever seen this sort of antic. And it would be rather a mistake if they did try to vary a farcical pattern so hallowed by time.

The Humor

For, even if your French makes it slightly difficult to follow all the narrative maneuvers, the fun is there to be relished. When, for example, Jean-Pierre Granval, as one of the comic servitors, disguises himself as a Turk and persuades an ancient gentleman, wonderfully played by Pierre Bertin, that Theodore, the rascally hero, is the old man's son, you can't miss the hilarity. With all its style, the humor is happily primitive enough to be appreciated in any language.

The evening's afterpiece, which is called simply "Les Adieux," brings out all of the company, some in their most familiar roles, to greet the audience and to be greeted, and to permit Mlle. Renaud to speak to us in French and M. Barrault to address us in both his language and ours. It is all pleasantly sentimental in graceful Gallic fashion, and the entire engagement has been so attractive that, when the eminent actor-manager talks of the theater as a potential instrument of international good will, you know he is speaking the truth.

Daily Mirror

February 19, 1957

Robert Coleman's ***THEATRE:***

French Troupe Bids Gracious Farewell

• Offers fine adaptation of Lope de Vega comedy for final week at Winter Garden

The Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault Company dipped into its capacious repertory bag Monday evening, and chose "Le Chien du Jardinier" for its final week at the Winter Garden. This is a sprightly adaptation by Georges Neveux of a Lope de Vega comedy. Pierre Boulez has arranged incidental music for the delightful romp.

Lope de Vega was an enormously prolific playwright. It is doubtful if even he was able to keep track of his output. He and Calderon de la Barca dominated the Spanish drama at a time when the Elizabethans of England were in full flower. "Le Chien du Jardinier," or "The Gardener's Dog," is representative of his work.

THE POINT OF it is that a jealous Countess resents rivals, while withholding her love from a handsome secretary. She is compared to the unreasonable dog who would not eat cabbage, and drove others away who would. After a series of romantic intrigues, the resourceful Theodore finally wins the hand of the haughty, petulant beauty.

Mme. Renaud, with charming grace, catches the temperamental facets of the Countess. Barrault is quite dashing as her impetuous suitor. Simone Valere is a saucy maid, who also attracts the attentions of Theodore. Jean-Pierre Granval, Gabriel Cattand, Georges Cusin, Natalie Nerval, Francoise Ledoux, Andre Jobin, Regis Outin, Jean Juillard and Pierre Bertin are others who contribute spirited characterizations.

Jean-Denis Malcles has designed a smart setting. Its color motifs are white, black and blue. Screens which can be shifted in the blink of an eye before a big backdrop lend fluidity to Barrault's staging.

"Le Chien du Jardinier" was followed by an after-piece, "Les Adieux." In this gracious farewell to American audiences, the company displays its amazing virtuosity. There are excerpts from classic and modern plays, sketches, poems, songs and pantomimes. It represents a startling range of material and technique.

IT MAKES ONE wonder why our nation cannot support such an outstanding repertory company. It is through such an institution that actors have the opportunity to develop styles with which to do justice to the masters of all ages. It emphasizes the perfection of ensembles as opposed to quickly integrated, individual essays in histrionics.

Our young actors, forced of necessity to skip from television to films to plays, haven't the time nor the chance to acquire true polish and versatility. That their performances, under these handicaps, are usually so excellent is a tribute to determination and tenacity.

But it takes a festive event, such as "Les Adieux," to make us realize that acting encompasses all phases of the theatre. Great performances are a blend of eloquent speech and plastic movement. And great performers should have a knowledge of miming, the dance and the meaning of words.

The distinguished Renaud-Barrault Company has not only provided enjoyment for discerning playgoers, but a school of the arts for ambitious young players, as well. So, anticipating the welcome visitors' return to France next week, we say affectionately: "Bon voyage! But do come back soon!"

DAILY NEWS
February 19, 1957

Renaud and Barrault Stage Their Final Bill

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Renaud-Barrault company began its last week of French repertoire at the Winter Garden last evening by presenting Georges Neveux' treatment of a Lope de Vega work, "Le Chien du Jardinier." Then the troupe put on an afterpiece titled "Les Adieux"—or, in English, "Goombye."

The "Gardener's Dog" comedy required the presence of everybody in the visiting assemblage with the exception, so far as I could count, of Beauchamp. I wish we'd had more of Beauchamp during the engagement of these tourists, for he is a comedian of special quality and this company is better at being funny than it is at being serious.

Costumed Characters

"Le Chien du Jardinier" is an over-long, multi-scened, elaborately costumed affair involving a countess, a couple of counts and goodness knows how many male and female servants. It is a fable of fair wit which enables most of the company to dress up and do character bits—and to dress up and do a character bit is what a French actor likes best.

Madeleine Renaud again shows herself to be a practically flawless comedienne. I wish I could be as enthusiastic about Jean-Louis Barrault, her husband, but it is not within me to do so.

Last night's audience gave the company many enthusiastic curtain calls after the play. Then, after a prolonged intermission during which the stage crew put onstage bits and pieces of all the scenery from all the plays which have been presented—including Christopher Columbus' big sail—the players came on and did bits and pieces and some careful ad-libbing.

Lincoln's Farewell

Barrault bade his adieu in English, quite charmingly, and included a few of Abraham Lincoln's words when Lincoln was leaving Springfield for Washington in 1861. "To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything . . ."

Good luck to these travelers on their forthcoming voyage through America. They are assured of success beforehand, I guess, because anything in a foreign language is cultural and anything cultural goes.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
February 19, 1957

THEATER

French Theater

By WALTER F. KERR

At the beginning of the magical little impromptu which constitutes the second half of the current bill at the Winter Garden, Jean-Louis Barrault steps forward, raises his hand, and—to his own obvious delight—speaks a few words of English. It's almost as clear as though he were speaking French.

• • •

Since Mr. Barrault and his enchanting colleagues have long since demonstrated their thesis that "the purpose of the theater is to away with differences," there's really no need for this small miracle of tongues. But it's ingratiating, anyway, and it serves to pave the way for the informal foolery—snatches and reminders of earlier productions, antic improvisations, and even a new bit of dance-pantomime involving the familiar Baptiste—that follows in pleasant disorder before a moonlit backstage wall.

• • •

This deadline-inhibited reviewer was off to the races before the clown-white face of Baptiste emerged from the shadows, but he'd had his share of dance for the evening, anyway. I'm not thinking now of the fact that, every so often in the byplay of Lope de Vega's "The Gardener's Dog," director Barrault has set his players to stomping out infuriated reactions in what seem to be flamenco rhythms: the heroine expressing her profound satisfaction at having whacked the hero's face by engaging in a thunderous two-step, the hero himself slapping one foot down hard whenever a justified impatience sets in.

What is really fascinating about this Georges Neveux adaptation of the old Spanish play is the verbal and psychological ballet that keeps spinning its intricate web through three enchanting acts. Madeleine Renaud is playing a Countess who has been so thoughtless as to fall in love with a fellow quite beneath her in the social scale—he is, in fact, her personal secretary—and M. Barrault is the underling who can make love and take letters with equal facility.

• • •

As these two eye one another, cagily circle one another, advance and retreat in a discreet but determined tug-of-emotional war, the image of two jovial, greedy, impudent spiders endlessly crossing threads and then desperately breaking loose comes to lively, almost venomous, life. As M. Barrault hangs his head sheepishly the better to woo his mistress, then hurls himself to the floor in abject—but wary—surrender, or as Mlle. Renaud leans longingly against him only to leap in polite horror at his least transgression, the sense of electrically-charged enemies who cannot resist one another is delectable. And the battle is beautifully sustained: there's always a last-minute flutter of the lady's aristocratic hands, or a flash of savage pride in M. Barrault's sardonic suitor, to keep the fragile contest crackling away.

And there are, in addition to droll performances from Jean-Pierre Granval, Jean Juillard, and Gabriel Cattand, at least two other portraits worth cherishing. One of them is Simone Valere's exuberantly passionate maid-in-waiting, an irresistible wench given to veritable snorts of ardor and violent onslaughts of devotion. The other is Pierre Bertin's briefly seen, but perfectly elaborated, arthritic old Count.

The moment comes when M. Bertin is informed that he has suddenly acquired a son. He feels the need to kick his heels for joy. One leg comes slowly off the floor, hesitates wistfully in unsteady suspension, and then shoots toward the wings in perilous gayety. That's a miniature kick, but the joy is all there.